

Inaugural Address of Governor Hulett C. Smith

January 18, 1965

MY FELLOW WEST VIRGINIANS:

I step forward today to accept this opportunity to serve West Virginia and all its people, with confidence and determination, knowing that today we begin an era of a New Spirit in West Virginia.

Though humbled by the honor you have given me, I am at the same time eager to meet the challenges which face West Virginia.

Indebted to all my friends, I have a keen awareness that more than my efforts alone brought me to this day.

I am grateful to my teachers, whose counsel guided me; thankful for my parents, whose example, sacrifices, and training in a Christian home inspired me, and will strengthen me in the times ahead; and for my wife and children, whose patience, encouragement and love sustain me.

My fellow citizens, we meet today to set the goals of a new Administration, to build on the proud achievements of the past, and to plan anew for the future.

It is a time to reaffirm those qualities which unite us, and to purge those elements which divide us.

We must set standards for our government's conduct, and search for a New Spirit to unite us all, as true sons and daughters of this proud state.

I have pledged that I would give this state an Administration of excellence, an Administration which will demand the highest standards of ethics, integrity and honesty from dedicated and qualified public servants, and never tolerate incompetence or mediocrity.

Today, as your Governor, I am proud to reaffirm that pledge of excellence.

With excellence as our standard, let us determine our goals not just for one year, nor just for four years, but for all the years that lie ahead.

These plans must be both objective and visionary; both prudent and imaginative.

First, I am determined that excellence in education will be our number-one goal. A great educational system is a prerequisite to a great state.

We must improve our schools, so that every child will have the best possible teacher, and every teacher the best possible salary and classroom.

Educational excellence must extend from our grade schools through our colleges and universities.

We must expand our adult education program.

In this manner, every citizen will have the opportunity for a continuing education.

It has been said, "There is a time for quality and a time for quantity."

Today, education in West Virginia is in need of both.

The pursuit of excellence must also be extended to the road programs of West Virginia.

Through careful use of highway funds, and through systematic planning, we can accelerate the building of the road system which West Virginia has long needed, and which is now within our reach.

We must give high priority to roads which provide service to our more inaccessible communities, our industries and our farms, so they can have full and general access to market places of the state and the nation.

We must continue to expand our interstate and primary system, so that we can truly unite all sections of our state, and our state with the nation.

The pursuit of excellence will carry into industry and commerce. We today are citizens of an "opportunity" state. We must explore all means to attract new industry, and to encourage our existing industries to expand. This will mean more jobs for thousands of West Virginians.

The New Spirit of excellence demands that we develop our tourist potential into a major industry for this state.

Nature has blessed West Virginia with great beauty. Now we must develop our scenic grandeur so that it will become a haven for the vacationer and the industrialist alike. We must tell the world what we have to offer in West Virginia - and this, too, shall be done.

This New Spirit of excellence will thrive only if there is an open-door policy between the state government and the people. I believe that the surest guarantee of responsible government is an informed public.

This New Spirit must be compassionate . . . compassionate for those who are in need in this state.

Together, then, we can build a state where self-reliant and intelligent citizens, united in progressive communities and rising above the petty prejudices of color, religion and race, will create a society where decency and dignity will prevail.

To achieve these goals, I need your assistance and dedication.

The call to greatness is sounding for us today.

You and I - public servant and private citizen alike - have a responsibility to pursue the course of excellence, to work together, and to develop our state to its full potential.

Instilled with this unity of purpose, and steadfast in our desire to improve all areas of community life; vitally concerned with the welfare of all citizens of today and tomorrow, we can travel on that high road of excellence.

My fellow citizens, let us resolve today to instill this New Spirit of excellence in our hearts and minds and lives, so that future generations might proudly boast of this great hour in our state's history.

Inspired by such resolution, and aware of our responsibilities to the future, we shall leave a heritage that will be a challenge to succeeding generations.

Let no West Virginian be mistaken. These goals of excellence will not easily be achieved. But you and I must constantly strive to make West Virginia first in the constellation of the fifty states.

We have a solid foundation upon which to build - a foundation left to us by Governor Barron.

We are fortunate that he has been a forward-looking chief executive, who possessed the vision to create programs of progress, and the courage to seek unconventional answers to unprecedented problems.

It is our responsibility, therefore, to carry forward these programs with action, and to propose new legislation to meet the needs of the future.

Tomorrow, I will go before the Legislature.

I will ask members of that distinguished body to join with me in creating new programs for better schools . . . more and better highways . . . for a more efficient and streamlined state government . . . and such other legislative programs which are necessary steps toward achieving our goal of excellence in government.

There are many fields of promise waiting to be harvested in West Virginia.

Let us reap that bountiful harvest.

We stand today at that blessed moment of beginning again, when no achievement of the past appears quite good enough, and no prospect of the future seems impossible.

We recognize that in the Mountain State, we have mountains to climb and obstacles to overcome, as we move toward our goals.

But we have pinnacles to reach, and we shall reach them.

So, my fellow West Virginians, let us pursue the goal of excellence. Let us seek the New Spirit in West Virginia. Let us seek new ways to advance the common good. Let us prayerfully and humbly ask guidance from a benevolent God who has so richly endowed our state.

For my part, I do not ask that the burdens of this great office be lightened, but that my back be strengthened to bear them.

In such a spirit, and with such goals, we can achieve a greatness worthy of this state and of its people.

I pray to Almighty God that I be given the light to perform my duties with courage, wisdom and compassion.

With this prayer, I welcome the challenges and burdens, the tasks and the responsibilities of this office.